

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY PRETORIA IMMEDIATE

INFO AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY CONAKRY

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CONAKRY FOR NEWSOM

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: TSPA, SF

SUBJ: NASA TRACKING STATION

1. FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF PRESS RELEASE TO BE ISSUED WASHINGTON JULY 10 ON NASA PLANS FOR JOHANNESBURG TRACKING STATION:

QUOTE. NASA ANNOUNCED TODAY THAT ITS CONTINUING STUDIES OF NEEDS FOR WORLD-WIDE TRACKING STATIONS HAVE SHOWN THAT FUTURE SPACECRAFT TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS WILL PERMIT A PHASEDOWN OF FACILITIES LOCATED AT THE TRACKING STATION NEAR JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA, BEGINNING IN MID-1974.

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NASA MAINTAINS TWO MAJOR TRACKING AND DATA ACQUISITION FACIL-

ITIES AT ITS STATION LOCATED NEAR JOHANNESBURG: A DEEP SPACE NETWORK (DSN) FACILITY SUPPORTING VARIOUS NASA PLANETARY-BOUND SPACECRAFT, AND A SATELLITE-TRACKING (STDN) FACILITY FOR EARTH-ORBITING AUTOMATED SCIENTIFIC SATELLITES.

NASA STATED THAT FOR THE NEW PLANETARY SPACECRAFT PROBING FURTHER INTO OUR SOLAR SYSTEM, AND BEYOND, INCREASING RELIANCE IS BEING PLACED ON THE LARGE 64-METER (210-FOOT) ANTENNA FACILITIES LOCATED IN GOLDSTONE, CALIFORNIA, AND NEW LARGE-DISH FACILITIES IN CANBERRA, AUSTRALIA; AND MADRID, SPAIN. TOGETHER WITH OTHER SMALLER 26-METER (85-FOOT) ANTENNAS ALSO LOCATED AT THE ABOVE STATIONS, NASA HAS FOUND

IT WILL NOT NEED A SIMILAR 26-METER ANTENNA AT JOHANNESBURG TO TRACK AND RECEIVE DATA FROM THE VARIOUS PLANETARY SPACECRAFT WHICH WILL BE FLYING AFTER JUNE 1974.

THE GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN STATION WAS OF PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE TO MANY OF NASA'S SPACECRAFT WHICH REQUIRED SOUTHERN-HEMISPHERE STATION LOCATIONS TO PROVIDE CONTINUOUS VISIBILITY. PLANETARY MISSIONS PLANNED FOR THE LATE 1970'S AND INTO THE 1980'S WILL BE VISIBLE FROM NASA'S NORTHERN HEMISPHERE STATIONS. NASA THEREFORE PLANS TO PHASE OUT OPERATION OF THE DSN FACILITY AT JOHANNESBURG ABOUT JUNE 1974.

THE STATION'S EARTH-ORBITING SATELLITE TRACKING FACILITIES WILL BE NEEDED UNTIL LATE IN 1975. NASA'S TENTATIVE PLANS WOULD BE ALSO TO PHASE OUT THE STDN FACILITIES BY THAT TIME; HOWEVER, FINER DEFINITION AND STUDY OF SATELLITE TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS IS NEEDED BEFORE A FINAL DECISION IS MADE.

THE JOHANNESBURG TRACKING STATION HAS BEEN OPERATED FOR NASA SINCE 1960 BY THE SOUTH AFRICAN COUNCIL FOR SCIENTIFIC AND INDUSTRIAL RESEARCH (CSIR), AN AGENCY OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT. UNDER THE AGREEMENT ENTERED INTO AT THAT TIME THE SOUTH AFRICAN AUTHORITIES HAVE HAD FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE MANAGEMENT AND OPERATION OF THE STATION TO MEET NASA'S TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS.

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IN MAKING THIS ANNOUNCEMENT, DR. JAMES C. FLETCHER, ADMINISTRATOR OF NASA, STATED THAT "THE TRACKING STATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA HAVE MET ESSENTIAL NEEDS OF THE U.S. SPACE PROGRAM FOR MANY YEARS AND HAVE PERFORMED THEIR TECHNICAL TASKS IN AN OUTSTANDING MANNER WITH A HIGH DEGREE OF PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE. NASA WILL ALWAYS BE GRATEFUL FOR THE TECHNICAL SUPPORT AND COOPERATION WE HAVE RECEIVED FROM THE

COUNCIL FOR SCIENTIFIC AND INDUSTRIAL RESEARCH AND ITS DEDICATED STATION PERSONNEL."

THE PLANNED PHASEDOWN OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN STATION IS PART OF AN OVERALL CONSOLIDATION ACTIVITY NOW GOING ON WITHIN THE NASA WORLD-WIDE TRACKING AND COMMUNICATION NETWORK. WITH THE CURRENT MANNED PROGRAM COMING TO AN END WITH SKYLAB IN LATE 1973 AND WITH THE APOLLO SOYUZ TEST PROJECT ACHIEVE OPERATIONAL CAPABILITIES IN 1980, AND WITH CONSIDERATIONS BEING GIVEN TO USING DATA RELAY SATELLITES TO DO MUCH OF THE GROUND STATIONS' JOB, SEVERAL OTHER CHANGES TO THE NASA TRACKING NETWORKS HAVE BEEN IMPLEMENTED. THE MOST

RECENT OF THESE HAVE INCLUDED THE CLOSING OF THE FORT MYERS, FLORIDA STATION, IN JUNE 1972, AND THE WOOMERA, AUSTRALIA STATION IN DECEMBER 1972. END QUOTE.

2. PRESS RELEASE IS FOR INFORMATION EMBASSY ONLY AND NOT TO BE ISSUED FORMALLY IN PRETORIA ALTHOUGH MAY BE USED AS BACKGROUND IN ANSWERING INQUIRIES AND COPIES GIVEN OUT TO S.A. OFFICIALS AS DEEMED APPROPRIATE. EMBASSY REQUESTED PROVIDE COPY TO DR. HEWITT OF CSIR EARLY WEDNESDAY MORNING, JULY 11 AND LET HIM HANDLE PUBLICITY FROM SOUTH AFRICAN SIDE. ROGERS

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